

Influenza Fact Sheet

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a very contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Each type includes many different strains which tend to change each year.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Typical symptoms of influenza include fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, stuffy or runny nose, cough sore throat and general weakness. These symptoms usually appear one to five days after a person is exposed to the virus.

How is influenza transmitted?

Influenza is spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing.

When and how long is a person able to spread influenza?

The contagious period varies, but probably begins the day before symptoms appear and lasts for about a week.

Can influenza be dangerous?

Yes. Although most people recover from the disease within one week, some have life-threatening complications such as pneumonia and may need to be hospitalized. Approximately 20,000 people die each year in the United States from influenza or related complications.

Can influenza be prevented?

Yes. People should practice "respiratory etiquette" to reduce the spread of respiratory diseases. Here are some simple steps to keep yourself and others from getting sick:

- Stay away from other people when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue away
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

In addition to these steps, getting a flu shot is an excellent way to prevent influenza. Because the types and strains of viruses that cause influenza change often, an influenza vaccination should be received every year. Some people who have been exposed to influenza may be prescribed an anti-viral medication to prevent or reduce the severity of illness.

Who should be vaccinated?

[Click here](#) for more information on who should be vaccinated.

How is influenza treated?

When taken within 2 days of illness onset, prescription anti-viral drugs can reduce the duration of uncomplicated influenza. There are four licensed anti-viral drugs available in the United States: amantadine and rimantadine for treatment and prevention of type A influenza, and oseltamivir and zanamivir for treatment of types A and B influenza. Oseltamivir is currently the only anti-viral drug approved for both treatment and prevention of types A and B influenza.

Where can I get more information?

Your private health care providers;

Your local public health department; and

The Utah Department of Health, Office of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

November 2004